

**Testimony of Nathan Frohling, Director of External Affairs
Before the Environment Committee
February 27, 2023**

in strong support of SB No. 979

AA PROMOTING ENERGY AFFORDABILITY, ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND GREEN CITIES

Thank you Co-Chairs Senator Lopes and Representative Gresko, Vice-Chairs Senator Hochadel and Representative Palm, Ranking Members Senator Harding and Representative Callahan, and all honorable members of the Environment Committee for this opportunity to testify on SB 979.

The Nature Conservancy in CT (TNC) expresses strong support for all measures of SB-979.

TNC's mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work in more than 70 countries and all 50 states in the United States. With the support of more than one million members globally and 43,000 in CT, TNC has been working to address climate change which threatens to undo the natural world and dangerously alter the lives of future generations. TNC is committed to helping reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to limit global warming to no more than 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures.

Each of the measures in this bill provide important, effective and meaningful support to our mission. I will be covering Sections 1 and 7 of the bill and my colleague Cary Lynch, Climate and Energy Policy Manager for TNC will be covering Sections 2 – 6 in separate testimony. The following represent our comments on section 1 and 7:

Section 1: Transmission

The Governor's bill addresses one of the most critical and essential issues we must solve if we have any chance of meeting the challenge of the climate crisis – the importance of electricity transmission, particularly as it relates to offshore wind power.

The good news is that the potential of offshore wind is tremendous to decarbonize New England and transform it into a region sustained by local renewable energy. But that potential will effectively remain trapped at sea if our regional transmission challenges are not coordinated and pro-actively addressed. ISO-NE's 2019 study on offshore wind integrations concluded that any significant quantity beyond 5.8 GW of offshore wind may not be able to interconnect into the regional grid without significant transmission upgrades and that already contracted offshore wind would consume existing capacity at the accessible interconnection points along the southern New England coast. Any new offshore wind beyond that already contracted may require new 345 kV transmission lines on new rights-of-way. One published report indicates that developers face up to \$787 million in onshore upgrade costs at these sites and that continuing this approach in the

next procurements could require more than an additional \$1 billion in upgrades. When considering the existing capacity constraints and then considering regional decarbonization goals, the offshore wind deficit is clear. The Massachusetts' Decarbonization Roadmap and a 2019 Brattle Group study describing how New England can achieve 80% GHG reductions by 2050 estimate that New England will need between 30GW and 45GW of offshore wind by 2050 to realize the states' collective decarbonization policies. To this end there is no greater climate action in New England than resolving the challenge of offshore wind transmission. In particular, the limitations of the existing onshore points of interconnection and the number of points of interconnection needed to receive offshore wind energy must be addressed. Without solving this challenge, we cannot build out the renewable energy and transmission infrastructure needed at the pace and scale required to achieve our climate goals in time.

For this reason, TNC supports the innovative Regional Transmission Initiative being pursued by the New England states and led by our own CT DEEP. This is the best approach for meeting our collective climate goals and for developing a sustainable, predictable, and flexible energy system that will minimize environmental impacts, and address regional and interregional reliability needs in the most cost-effective way. In short, we need to do all we can to support this initiative and the Governor's bill does just that. At its most basic, CT needs clear authority to participate in the process of taking action on transmission and doing so in collaboration with the other New England states in the ISO-NE region. Again, this legislation provides that – both the technical/legal clarity and a signal to the other New England states that CT is ready to both lead and join this critical regional effort at accomplishing critical transmission needs.

Sections 2 – 6: Covered by my colleague Cary Lynch, Climate and Energy Policy Manager for TNC as noted above.

Section 7: Urban Tree Canopy:

We strongly agree with the wording in this Governor's bill concerning the importance socially and ecologically of increasing tree canopy in urban areas. The Nature Conservancy considers work in urban areas very important for many reasons and that includes increasing urban tree cover, something we have been working on, particularly in the City of Bridgeport. We do question why the goal is as low as 5% because CT typically has tree cover higher than 5% in urban municipalities. The 5% goal may be more applicable at the neighborhood scale and/or in environmental justice communities (which we realize is the focus of the bill). Nevertheless, a higher goal such as 10-15% may still be appropriate in many of these areas. With the bill's focus on environmental justice communities, we believe a more nuanced approach may be needed that takes into account the unique situations of each town/city. Finally where there are neighborhoods in unique ecological situations (e.g. urban coastal neighborhoods), a modest goal of 5% urban canopy may be appropriate. Progress on urban tree cover will take more than a goal, especially a very modest goal of 5% but it is a start!

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.